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HOUSE BILL NO. 1921

Offered January 13, 2021

Prefiled January 10, 2021

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 24.2-638, 24.2-646.1, and 24.2-649 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 24.2-649.1, relating to assistance for certain voters; curbside voting.

Patrons—Price, Adams, D.M., Ayala, Bourne, Carr, Carter, Cole, J.G., Convirs-Fowler, Delaney, Gooditis, Guzman, Hope, Keam, Kory, Krizek, Levine, Lopez, McQuinn, Mundon King, Murphy, Rasoul, Reid, Scott, Simon, Tran, Watts and Williams Graves

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 24.2-638, 24.2-646.1, and 24.2-649 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted and that the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 24.2-649.1 as follows:

§ 24.2-638. Voting equipment to be in plain view; officers and others not permitted to see actual voting; unlocking counter compartment of equipment, etc.

During the election, the exterior of the voting equipment and every part of the polling place shall be in plain view of the officers of election.

No voting or counting machines shall be removed from the plain view of the officers of election or from the polling place at any time during the election and through the determination of the vote as provided in § 24.2-657. However, an electronic voting machine that is so constructed as to be easily portable may be taken outside the polling place pursuant to subsection A of § 24.2-649 and to assist a voter age 65 or older or physically disabled so long as: (i) the voting machine remains in the plain view of two officers of election representing two political parties or, in a primary election, two officers of election representing the party conducting the primary, provided that if the use of two officers for this purpose would result in too few officers remaining in the polling place to meet legal requirements, the machine shall remain in plain view of one officer who shall be either the chief officer or the assistant chief officer; (ii) the voter casts his ballot in a secret manner unless the voter requests assistance pursuant to § 24.2-649; and (iii) there remain sufficient officers of election in the polling place to meet legal requirements, except as provided in subsection D of § 24.2-649.1. After the voter has completed voting his ballot, the officer or officers shall immediately return the voting machine to its assigned location inside the polling place. The machine number, the time that the machine was removed and the time that it was returned, the number on the machine's public counter before the machine was removed and the number on the same counter when it was returned, the names of the voters who used the machine while it was removed provided that secrecy of the ballot is maintained in accordance with guidance from the State Board, and the name or names of the officer or officers who accompanied the machine shall be recorded on the statement of results. If a polling place fails to record the information required in the previous sentence, or it is later proven that the information recorded was intentionally falsified, the local electoral board or general registrar shall dismiss at a minimum the chief officer or the assistant chief officer, or both, as appropriate, and shall dismiss any other officer of election who is shown to have caused the failure to record the required information intentionally or by gross negligence or to have intentionally falsified the information. The dismissed officers shall not be allowed thereafter to serve as an officer or other election official anywhere in the Commonwealth. In the case of an emergency that makes a polling place unusable or inaccessible, voting or counting machines may be removed to an alternative polling place pursuant to the provisions of subsection D of § 24.2-310.

The equipment shall be placed at least four feet from any table where an officer of election is working or seated. The officers of election shall not themselves be, or permit any other person to be, in any position or near any position that will permit them to observe how a voter votes or has voted.

One of the officers shall inspect the face of the voting machine after each voter has cast his vote and verify that the ballots on the face of the machine are in their proper places and that the machine has not been damaged. During an election, the door or other covering of the counter compartment of the voting or counting machine shall not be unlocked or open or the counters exposed except for good and sufficient reasons, a statement of which shall be made and signed by the officers of election and attached to the statement of results. No person shall be permitted in or about the polling place except the voting equipment custodian, vendor, or contractor technicians and other persons authorized by this title.

§ 24.2-646.1. Permitted use of paper ballots.

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57 The official paper ballot shall be used by a voter to cast his vote only in one of the following
58 circumstances:

59 1. The official paper ballot is the only ballot in use in the precinct.

60 2. The official paper ballot is used by voters voting outside of the polling place pursuant to
61 § 24.2-649 § 24.2-649.1.

62 3. The voter is casting a provisional ballot.

63 4. The voter is provided an official paper ballot or copy thereof pursuant to § 24.2-642 when voting
64 equipment is inoperable or otherwise unavailable.

65 5. The official absentee paper ballot voted in accordance with (§ 24.2-700 et seq.).

66 6. The voter is provided an official paper ballot for a presidential election pursuant to § 24.2-402 or
67 for federal elections pursuant to § 24.2-453.

68 **§ 24.2-649. Assistance for certain voters inside the polling place; penalties.**

69 A. Any voter age 65 or older or physically disabled may request and then shall be handed a printed
70 ballot by an officer of election outside the polling place but within 150 feet of the entrance to the
71 polling place. The voter shall mark the printed ballot in the officer's presence but in a secret manner
72 and, obscuring his vote, return the ballot to the officer. The officer shall immediately return to the
73 polling place and shall deposit a paper ballot in the ballot container in accordance with § 24.2-646 or a
74 machine-readable ballot in the ballot scanner machine in accordance with the instructions of the State
75 Board.

76 Any county or city that has acquired an electronic voting machine that is so constructed as to be
77 easily portable may use the voting machine in lieu of a printed ballot for the voter requiring assistance
78 pursuant to this subsection. However, the electronic voting machine may be used in lieu of a printed
79 ballot only so long as: (i) the voting machine remains in the plain view of two officers of election
80 representing two political parties, or in a primary election, two officers of election representing the party
81 conducting the primary, provided that if the use of two officers for this purpose would result in too few
82 officers remaining in the polling place to meet legal requirements, the voting machine shall remain in
83 plain view of one officer who shall be either the chief officer or the assistant chief officer and (ii) the
84 voter casts his ballot in a secret manner unless the voter requests assistance pursuant to this section.
85 After the voter has completed voting his ballot, the officer or officers shall immediately return the
86 voting machine to its assigned location inside the polling place. The machine number, the time that the
87 machine was removed and the time that it was returned, the number on the machine's public counter
88 before the machine was removed and the number on the same counter when it was returned, and the
89 name or names of the officer or officers who accompanied the machine shall be recorded on the
90 statement of results.

91 B. Any qualified voter who requires assistance to vote by reason of physical disability or inability to
92 read or write may, if he so requests, be assisted in voting. If he is blind, he may designate an officer of
93 election or any other person to assist him. If he is unable to read and write or disabled for any cause
94 other than blindness, he may designate an officer of election or some other person to assist him other
95 than the voter's employer or agent of that employer, or officer or agent of the voter's union.

96 The officer of election or other person so designated shall not enter the booth with the voter unless
97 (i) the voter signs a request stating that he requires assistance by reason of physical disability or
98 inability to read or write and (ii) the officer of election or other person signs a statement that he is not
99 the voter's employer or an agent of that employer, or an officer or agent of the voter's union, and that he
100 will act in accordance with the requirements of this section. The request and statement shall be on a
101 single form furnished by the State Board. If the voter is unable to sign the request, his own mark
102 acknowledged by him before an officer of election shall be sufficient signature, provided no mark shall
103 be required of a voter who is blind. An officer of election shall advise the voter and person assisting the
104 voter of the requirements of this section and record the name of the voter and the name and address of
105 the person assisting him.

106 The officer of election or other person so designated shall assist the qualified voter in the preparation
107 of his ballot in accordance with his instructions and without soliciting his vote or in any manner
108 attempting to influence his vote and shall not in any manner divulge or indicate, by signs or otherwise,
109 how the voter voted on any office or question. If a printed ballot is used, the officer or other person so
110 designated shall deposit the ballot in the ballot container in accordance with § 24.2-646 or in the ballot
111 scanner machine in accordance with the instructions of the State Board.

112 C. B. If the voter requires assistance in a language other than English and has not designated a
113 person to assist him, an officer of election, before he assists as interpreter, shall inquire of the
114 representatives authorized to be present pursuant to § 24.2-604.4 whether they have a volunteer
115 available who can interpret for the voter. One representative interpreter for each party or candidate,
116 insofar as available, shall be permitted to observe the officer of election communicate with the voter.
117 The voter may designate one of the volunteer party or candidate interpreters to provide assistance. A
118 person so designated by the voter shall meet all the requirements of this section for a person providing

119 assistance.

120 ~~D.~~ C. A person who willfully violates subsection ~~B~~ A or ~~C~~ B is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor. In
121 addition, the provisions of § 24.2-1016 and its felony penalties for false statements shall be applicable to
122 any request or statement signed pursuant to this section, and the provisions of §§ 24.2-704 and
123 24.2-1012 and the felony penalties for violations of the law related to providing assistance to absentee
124 voters shall be applicable in such cases.

125 ~~E.~~ D. In any precinct in which an electronic voting machine is available that provides an audio
126 ballot, the officers of election shall notify a voter requiring assistance pursuant to this section that such
127 machine is available for him to use to vote in privacy without assistance and the officers of election
128 shall instruct the voter on the use of the voting machine. Nothing in this section shall be construed to
129 require a voter to use the machine unassisted.

130 **§ 24.2-649.1. Assistance for certain voters outside of the polling place.**

131 A. Any voter with a disability or who is age 65 or older shall be entitled to vote outside of the
132 polling place in accordance with the provisions of this section. However, during a declared state of
133 emergency related to a communicable disease of public health threat, any voter, regardless of age or
134 disability, shall be entitled to vote outside of the polling place in accordance with the provisions of this
135 section. For purposes of this section, a disability shall include a permanent physical disability, a
136 temporary physical disability, or an injury.

137 B. The area designated for voting outside of the polling place shall be within 150 feet of the
138 entrance to the polling place. This area shall be clearly marked, and instructions on how to notify an
139 officer of election of the voter's request to vote outside of the polling place shall be prominently
140 displayed. The Department shall prescribe the form and content of such instructions, but in no case
141 shall the voter be required to enter the polling place to provide such notice.

142 C. A voter eligible pursuant to subsection A shall be handed a printed ballot by an officer of
143 election. He shall mark the ballot in the officer's presence but in a secret manner and, obscuring his
144 vote, shall return the ballot to the officer. The officer shall immediately return to the polling place and
145 shall deposit a paper ballot in the ballot container in accordance with § 24.2-646 or a
146 machine-readable ballot in the ballot scanner machine in accordance with the instructions of the State
147 Board.

148 D. Any county or city that has acquired an electronic voting machine that is so constructed as to be
149 easily portable may use the voting machine in lieu of a printed ballot for voting outside of the polling
150 place, so long as: (i) the voting machine remains in the plain view of two officers of election
151 representing two political parties, or in a primary election, two officers of election representing the
152 party conducting the primary, provided that if the use of two officers for this purpose would result in
153 too few officers remaining in the polling place to meet legal requirements, the voting machine shall
154 remain in plain view of one officer who shall be either the chief officer or the assistant chief officer and
155 (ii) the voter casts his ballot in a secret manner unless the voter requests assistance pursuant to §
156 24.2-649.

157 After the voter has completed voting his ballot, the officer or officers shall immediately return the
158 voting machine to its assigned location inside the polling place, and shall record (a) the machine
159 number, (b) the time that the machine was removed and the time that it was returned, (c) the number on
160 the machine's public counter before the machine was removed and the number on the same counter
161 when it was returned, and (d) the name or names of the officer or officers who accompanied the
162 machine on the statement of results. The names of the voters who used the machine while it was
163 removed shall also be recorded provided that secrecy of the ballot is maintained in accordance with
164 guidance from the State Board. If a polling place fails to record the information required in clause (a),
165 (b), (c), or (d), or it is later proven that the information recorded was intentionally falsified, the local
166 electoral board or general registrar shall dismiss at a minimum the chief officer or the assistant chief
167 officer, or both, as appropriate, and shall dismiss any other officer of election who is shown to have
168 caused the failure to record the required information intentionally or by gross negligence or to have
169 intentionally falsified the information. The dismissed officers shall not be allowed thereafter to serve as
170 an officer or other election official anywhere in the Commonwealth.